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SUBJECT: POLLSTERS SEE PRESIDENTIAL RACE AT "CRITICAL"
POINT

REF: Mexico 1002

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador again convened four pollsters (reftel) who concurred that Democratic Revolution (PRD) candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) and National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderon were virtually tied, making this a critical moment for the campaign. While it might be hard to "win" next week's debate, all agreed that a serious error by either leading contender could be maximized by his opponent. They also anticipated that additional "scandals" might come out in the course of the month. Absent any new political events, the final month of the campaign would depend on strategies and media "spots." Three out of four pollsters present, when pressed, gave the margin to AMLO on election day if the two candidates are still in a virtual tie by then. End Summary.

Discounting the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI)

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by POL and PAS, met for the second time 6/1 with leading pollsters Rafael Jimenez (ARCOP for the PAN), Ana Cristina Covarrubias (Pulso for the PRD), Francisco Abundis (Parametria and Channel 40 commentator) and Roy Campos (Consulta Mitofsky and Televisa pollster). During the usual lively discussion certain points of agreement emerged:

-- the four agreed the two leading candidates, AMLO and Calderon, were virtually tied.

-- the four agreed that the PRI no longer figured realistically in the presidential race, although it would still remain important in congressional and local races.

-- the four agreed that next week's debate importance would be determined by how the campaigns used it in follow-on strategies. For example, the PAN had effectively promoted the perception that Calderon had "won" the April debate in follow-on ads, while at the same time the PRI had stressed AMLO's failure to participate. Both messages resonated with the public primarily because of the PRI and PAN follow-on ads, according to the pollsters. While it was probable no one would "win" the debate outright, it was very possible someone would make a mistake that the others would magnify in subsequent "spots."

Factors That Could Affect the Polls

¶3. (SBU) Rafael Jimenez said this was a "critical" point for the election because of the technical tie between the candidates. It would come down to who had the most effective campaign strategy -- and who could turn out the vote. Abundis suggested, and the others agreed, that outside of the debate, June would likely also bring out whatever videoscandals or other derogatory surprises the campaigns could uncover. Finally, there was inconclusive

discussion of the impact the World Cup would have on the candidates and voter turnout. Mitofsky and Jimenez suggested the PAN would benefit if the Mexico team did unexpectedly well. All agreed that a peripheral benefit of the increased television viewing during the games was that more people would see the campaign ads. There was no consensus on whether or how the World Cup might affect voter turn-out, which those present estimated would be 50-60 percent.

AMLO Has the Edge

¶4. (SBU) When pressed, the four pollsters gave highly-caveated guesses regarding the final outcome. Three of the four suggested that if Calderon and AMLO were neck-and-neck going into election day, probably AMLO would have the edge. Reasons ranged from the fervor of his support to his qualities as a candidate to a sense that change was needed. Not surprisingly, PAN pollster Jimenez came out firmly for Calderon.

Garza